

THESE FOUR WALLS

a full-length play

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CHARACTERS:

ALGER, in his late thirties

EVELYN, wife of **ALGER**, in her late thirties

MOTHER PEARL, ghost of **ALGER'S** mother

IVY, **ALGER** and **EVELYN'S** 17-year-old daughter

PAULY, ghost of **ALGER** and **EVELYN'S** 18-year-old son

WEASEL (Henry) **BARNES**, **IVY'S** boyfriend

AXEL BARNES, **WEASEL'S** father (a voice offstage)

TIME:

Now.

PLACE:

The suggestion of **ALGER** and **EVELYN'S** house.

ACT I

Setting: Two children's size chairs sit downstage left. A high chair sits upstage, at center right. A free-standing closet sits further upstage, at left.

At rise: **EVELYN** and **ALGER** sit in the two small chairs.

ALGER

You and me, Evelyn, we're looking at the world through a fog of dumbness.

EVELYN

The view is sweet from here.

ALGER

Axel Barnes says there's people out there beyond the lake who dress funny and speak other languages.

EVELYN

It's no business of ours. Let the good Lord --

ALGER

But Axel says --

EVELYN

(interrupting)

Axel Barnes hit you over the head with his garden shovel.

ALGER

Do you think it's true?

EVELYN

I saw it with my own eyes.

ALGER

No, I mean about the people out there beyond the lake.

EVELYN

Nothing true we don't know about, Alger. Keeps it all very simple. I leave knowing things up to God. I say to myself, "keep it simple, Evelyn. Eggs in the morning. That you know."

ALGER

But don't you think for Ivy's sake we ought to learn more? She's getting smarter than us, Evelyn.

EVELYN

Well, she'd better not get too smart.

ALGER

I want her to be proud of us.

EVELYN

Ivy doesn't like us the way we are, she can leave. That's what my father always said to me. "You don't like the way we do things here, you can catch the next bus out. I'll pack you a sandwich."

ALGER

Your father was a mean bastard.

EVELYN

He taught me right from wrong. I turned out O.K. Ivy'll do the same.

ALGER

What about me, Evelyn?

EVELYN

What about you?

ALGER

I don't want to spend the rest of my life fixing cars.

EVELYN

You've always liked it.

ALGER

I've always hated it.

EVELYN

Don't exaggerate, Alger.

ALGER

I have hated every minute of it. Every lube job, every tune-up, every fan belt, every. . .every --

EVELYN

(interrupting)

How can you say that? Your family's been fixing cars forever.

ALGER

Right. What else did I think I could do?

EVELYN

Nothing.

ALGER

I want more than a sore back and grease on my hands every night.

EVELYN

What you want is a bath.

ALGER

No, Evelyn. That's not what I want. I know what I want.

EVELYN

What's that, Alger?

ALGER

I want to cut hair.

EVELYN

Have you lost your mind?

ALGER

I love hair. I've always loved hair.

EVELYN

I'll be the laughing stock of this whole town.

ALGER

Everybody knows I cut yours.

EVELYN

No they don't. That's a private matter between us.

ALGER

Only beauty shop in town is Mr. John's. You never go there. Who do they think cuts your hair?

EVELYN

If you must know, they think I do it myself. Mr. John's invited me to join the shop several times. I just tell him I have too many things to do at home.

ALGER

How could you lie like that?

EVELYN

You think I want everyone in town saying I'm married to a fairy?

ALGER

Mr. John's no fairy. He's got ten kids.

EVELYN

He's a Catholic. And, besides, people already think you're strange. They say you're a little soft in the head.

ALGER

I don't give a damn what the people in this town think. I want to cut hair. It's what I dream of day and night. Bringing some beauty into this world. It's my destiny, Evelyn. There's no turning back. I read about this somewhere. (beat) And, besides, it's about time Mr. John had a little competition.

EVELYN

You want enemies now?

ALGER

A man waits his whole life to say what he wants and all of a sudden he's got enemies to worry about. All I want is a nice little business to call my own. Is that a crime?

EVELYN

We've never had an enemy in our lives. Do you want to be attacked now? Is that what you want? No one's ever attacked us.

ALGER

What about Axel Barnes?

EVELYN

He'll do more than hit you over the head this time. He might just kill you

ALGER

Let him try.

EVELYN

You don't mean that.

ALGER

I do. If I go under another car without thinking there's something else ahead of me in this world, I might just kill myself.

EVELYN

Bzzz. Bzzz. Bzzz. I didn't hear that. (beat) Now let's go inside.

(**ALGER** hesitates.)

Come on.

(**ALGER** follows **EVELYN** into the house. Enter **IVY** in a pink prom dress and flip-flops.)

EVELYN

Well look who's here. Aren't you the prettiest thing I've ever seen?

IVY

Yes, Mother.

EVELYN

Is that the new dress Daddy picked out for you?

ALGER

Our little girl's not so little anymore. Look at you, Ivy. Just look at you. Is Weasel Barnes taking you to the prom?

IVY

Mr. Barnes told him he didn't want any son of his going around with me. Why does he hate us, Daddy?

ALGER

We cannot blame the son for the sins of the father.

IVY

Is Mr. Barnes a sinner?

ALGER

You think about your prom, dear. Do you have another date yet?

IVY

I'd like to go with Mary Jane, but she wants to go with Weasel now that he's free.

EVELYN

All these boys want is one thing anyway.

IVY

And her mother wants her to go with a boy.

EVELYN

That Eloise always was a tramp. Slept with every man in town before she got to the tenth grade.

(**IVY** begins to cry.)

IVY

Now no one will go to the prom with me.

EVELYN

(to **ALGER**)

This is all your fault.

ALGER

I'm going over to talk to Axel.

IVY

Daddy?

ALGER

(throwing a fur shawl over his shoulder)
I will not let my daughter be humiliated.

EVELYN

For the love of God, Alger, you're not going to wear the shawl.

ALGER

There's a chill in the air.

(A knock on the door.)

ALGER

Who is it?

EVELYN

Who is it?

(No response.)

Quick. Ivy, hide in the closet.

IVY

But I want to stay here with --

EVELYN

(interrupting)
Get in the closet now.

(A loud knock on the door.)

ALGER

Don't speak harshly to her, Evelyn. Ivy, dear, step into the closet for a minute, would you please?

IVY

Okay, Daddy.

(**IVY** curtsies and climbs into the closet.)

ALGER

And be careful not to wrinkle your dress.

EVELYN

What should we do?

ALGER

I will not be intimidated. I'm going to answer this door right now.

(**ALGER** hesitates. **EVELYN** opens the door. There stands the ghost of **ALGER's** mother properly dressed with a handbag.)

EVELYN

Look what the devil dragged in.

ALGER

Oh Mother, not now.

EVELYN

I'll go get the fire extinguisher.

MOTHER PEARL

(looking at **EVELYN**)

She's always been as dumb as a bag of manure.

(Exit **EVELYN**.)

Did you have to knock her up?

ALGER

You know how I feel about you putting down Evelyn.

MOTHER PEARL

First she took you from me. And now she's taking your dreams.

ALGER

Mother, please. Stop your spying.

MOTHER PEARL

I can't stand to see you unhappy, son. I'll never rest like this.

ALGER

You caused a lot of problems between us while you were alive.

MOTHER PEARL

She was the problem from day one. That's what you get when you marry a tramp. Don't think she's not running around.

ALGER

Mother, why do you torture me?

MOTHER PEARL

It's my job. And what are you going to do about Axel?

ALGER

I was on my way over there just now.

(**IVY**, from the closet.)

IVY

Daddy, I'm hungry.

ALGER

Don't you be rude, young lady. I'm talking to your grandmother.

IVY

Hello, Grandma Pearl. Could you ask Daddy to let me out of the closet?

MOTHER PEARL

When hell freezes over, you little trollop.

(to **ALGER**)

She's Evelyn's inside out.

ALGER

That's enough, Mother.

MOTHER PEARL

Not a drop of our blood in her. Did you ever find out whose she is?

ALGER

I said ENOUGH.

(**ALGER** chases **MOTHER PEARL** offstage with his fur shawl, as **EVELYN** enters. She and **MOTHER PEARL** hiss at each other.)

EVELYN

That old witch. Never knows when to keep her nose out of our business.

ALGER

When are you two going to stop fighting?

EVELYN

Never. She ruined my life.

ALGER

Oh, now, Evelyn.

EVELYN

Even dead, she's up to the same old (beat) shit.

ALGER

You know better than to use that language in front of Ivy.

(**EVELYN** blesses herself.)

Speaking of which, where is she?

EVELYN

Oh. She's in the closet.

(They run to the closet door. **ALGER** opens it. **IVY** flops out in a lump on the floor.)

EVELYN

Look, Alger. Isn't that sweet? She's fallen asleep.

ALGER

We better give her some dinner.

EVELYN

We have never had one ounce of trouble with that girl since the day she was born.

ALGER

Poor little thing. I think she said she was hungry when Mother Pearl was here.

(**ALGER** and **EVELYN** each pick **IVY** up by one arm.)

EVELYN

Ivy, are you hungry?

ALGER

Come on, baby. We'll carry you to your chair.

IVY

Me want eat.

ALGER

Sweet little baby. Daddy's little baby girl.

(**ALGER** and **EVELYN** plop **IVY** down in the high chair.)

EVELYN

Look at the big girl. She's all ready for the prom. How time does fly, Alger. Would you like some nice cream corn, darling?

IVY

No.

EVELYN

Come on now, Ivy. You want to grow up healthy and strong, don't you?

IVY

I want spare ribs.

EVELYN

(to **ALGER**)

The cheek.

ALGER

She's just testing her limits.

EVELYN

You will have cream corn, young lady, and you will like it.

IVY

No. I won't eat. (louder) I won't eat.

EVELYN

Now what do we do?

ALGER

You're the mother. What do you think we should do?

EVELYN

This is your last chance, Ivy.

IVY

(as a two-year-old)

No. No. No.

EVELYN

(to **ALGER**)

What she needs is the belt.

ALGER

Just one more chance, Evelyn? Please?

EVELYN

Did you hear that, Ivy? Are you going to cooperate?

IVY

No.

EVELYN

(to **ALGER**)

Allright. That's it. Tie her up.

(**IVY** lowers her head, puts her hands behind the chair.)

ALGER

Aren't we being harsh? Maybe she's not hungry.

EVELYN

The limits, Alger, the limits. We must set limits.

ALGER

I'm only saying--

EVELYN

(interrupting, hands him rope)

Just do it.

(**ALGER** ties **IVY**'s hands behind the chair.)

ALGER

Now, Ivy, you know I'm only doing this because I have to.

EVELYN

It's for her own good.

ALGER

You've got to eat a proper dinner if you're to grow healthy and strong.

(**IVY** keeps her head down.)

EVELYN

Don't reason with her. Show her you mean business.

ALGER

Nothing in the Bible against reasoning.

EVELYN

Spare the rod; spoil the child. What do you think that means?

(**IVY** picks up her head.)

IVY

I'll eat corn.

ALGER

That's a good girl. Daddy will feed you.

(**ALGER** feeds **IVY** by spoonfuls, like a baby.)

Isn't it delicious?

(**IVY** nods her head yes.)